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Epistemological Breaks in the Methodology of Social Research: Rupture and the Artifice of Technique

Natasha Whiteman & Russell Dudley-Smith

Key words:

artifice; ethics of
rupture;
Bachelard;
qualitative data
analysis; Dowling;
relational space;
social activity
method; Becker

Abstract: As has often been noted, BACHELARD's counter-intuitive orientation to scientific inquiry, with its rationalizing insistence on relational anti-essentialism, has profound implications for social research methodology. The question remains how this orientation might inform the actual practice of research. In this article we present a pragmatic response, one that emphasizes the need to scrupulously avoid the use of essentialized categories. Doing so involves much work and constant vigilance, for which technique is an absolute requirement. Our reading of BACHELARD therefore insists that productive research requires the artifice of a methodological technology that wrenches research from self-evidence whilst avoiding its ossification in theory. We argue that this continuous disruption and rebuilding of forms of thought is necessary but often neglected in social research; often simply because suitable technology is unavailable. By developing work by DOWLING (1998, 2009, 2013), we then suggest one that is. This is demonstrated by contrasting a diagrammatic technology known for only breaking weakly with established categories—BECKER's classification of deviance—with a *relational space* that achieves the rational artifice required (one in fact more consistent with BECKER's own pragmatic project). The value of the artifice a relational space achieves is then illustrated in the empirical context of digital file-sharing.

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1. Introduction

In recent decades, BACHELARD's work has had considerable significance in the philosophy of science (LECOURT, 2001; RHEINBERGER, 2010a, 2010b; STADLER, 2010). It has also been of profound importance in the development of methodological thinking in FOUCAULTian (DIAZ-BONE, 2006; GUTTING, 1989; WEBER, 2001) and BOURDIEUsian (BOURDIEU and WACQUANT, 1992; BOURDIEU, CHAMBOREDON & PASSERON, 1991 [1968]; VANDENBERGHE, 1999) perspectives, as well as in work that sutures FOUCAULTian and BOURDIEUsian relational insights (DIAZ-BONE, 2006). BACHELARD (1968 [1940]) locates the realization of science in the complex of its assembled practices rather than in either progressive rationalism (thought taken to be sovereign on its own enlightened terms) or transparent empiricism (the real sought to be seen for what it appears really to be). In doing so, he emphasizes the significance of artificial technologies through which counter-intuitive findings are produced (TRESCH, 2012) and inscribed (LATOUR & WOOLGAR, 1986). Core to this concept of artifice is a view of the work of negation in concept development: one that rejects continuity (the smooth progression of thought, the steady accumulation of what is known) and instead puts emphasis upon the ongoing transformation of research practices. [1]

For BACHELARD (1968 [1940]), the naturalization of sedimented research experience must be confronted: a philosophy of "no." This concept of negation suggests to us an orientation to an ethics of rupture achieved through specialized practices that are reflexively oriented to break with their own established forms of thought. Central to BACHELARD's vision is an insistence on the development of artificial technology (*phénoménotechnique*). The idea is to move away from substantialist to relational accounts, wrenching the world of research from the seductive psychological investments of self-evidence whilst also seeking to avoid its ossification in theory. The problematic we seek to address here is the availability of relational methodology for *social* research. As anthropologies of science have made clear, scientific practice is constituted not only in specialized instruments through which new findings can be inscribed (LATOUR & WOOLGAR, 1986) but also through the development of rigorous methods such as ways of preparing samples that allow counter-naturalistic discoveries to be articulated (RHEINBERGER, 2010b). The artifice of rupture is thus, in our reading, a matter of praxis. Our focus will be on methods to describe the regularities achievable in locally emergent social action rather than appealing to an underlying system or totality of conditions of possibility. [2]

In Anglophone writing on social research methodology, BACHELARD's counter-intuitive orientation to the methodology of scientific research has inspired a general orientation that seeks to break with essentialized thinking, rather than being taken as suggesting specific lines of methodological development. The German schools of FOUCAULTian discourse analysis have sought to give more weight to the emphasis on the *realization* of structuration in the composition of human action (DIAZ-BONE, 2006). Whilst there have been powerful but quite general expressions of the significance of BACHELARD's ideas for thinking about

the social (GUTTING, 1989; WEBER, 2001), the profound importance of his thinking for social research is perhaps most evident in the development of "reflexive sociology" (BOURDIEU & WACQUANT, 1992; BOURDIEU et al. 1991 [1968]). This also informed significant developments of discourse analysis in the 1960s-1980s (HELSLOOT & HAK, 2007) and the influential later development of BACHELARDian ideas by DIAZ-BONE (2006, 2013). Informed by this work, post-foundational discourse analysis has also drawn on BACHELARD (e.g., MARTTILA, 2013), as has writing on case study research (VENNESSON, 2008). [3]

Of interest to the line of argument we pursue in this article, the early work of BACHELARD has also inspired some central anti-essentialist thinking in pragmatist traditions of American social research (FUCHS, 2001). However, although the promise of his work has been noted in recent literature (ALBERT, MYLOPOULOS & LABERGE, 2018), within this pragmatic tradition there has been a quite limited range of attempts to articulate specific rupturing technologies with which to enable social description, with insufficient regard given to the significant European recruitments of BACHELARD's work mentioned above. [4]

It is not only the orientation of the researcher's methodological stance that is at stake here. Without sensitivity to relational artifice, methods of coding—not unusually given extended space in research articles—often end up appearing redundant as what turn out to be more-or-less common-sensical readings of data are presented. The price of this is that terms circulating in the everyday, saturated with unexamined metaphors, or those decontextualized from context and imported uncritically from other disciplines, may reproduce essentialist thinking even if the overarching methodology stakes a relational claim. From a BACHELARDian perspective, to counter such naturalism within the social sciences requires technology with which to make the data become strange. A form of dialectic becomes central to methodological endeavor: the need (as the more recent work in discourse analysis mentioned above has made clear) to *both* dismantle received categories and find strategies for recomposing social description in ways that defeat essentialism. Yet too often this need is not confronted. [5]

Where it has been confronted, the most influential route has been for researchers to look instead to depth ontology (to identify the real structuration beneath surface phenomenon). Previous work developing BACHELARDian insights for social research has suggested that without the false-security of naïve empiricism, something has to anchor the artifice of relational methodological techniques: otherwise relativism would be, it is claimed, the inevitable result. Thus VANDENBERGHE (1999) suggests that BOURDIEU's sociology should be purified of its "as if" (VAIHINGER, 1965 [1911]) neo-KANTianism in favor of ontological support in the philosophy of critical realism. From this point of view, trading in the merely phenomenological layer is relativistic and arbitrary as there is nothing to constrain interpretation. Contrary to this, taking a pragmatic rather than realist point of view, and in line with authors such as BAERT (2005), our position is that what matters is the achievement of a workable *methodological* relationality with which to counter essentialism (DUDLEY-SMITH & WHITEMAN,

in press). From this position, questions of ontology are redundant. The focus is instead on a coherent methodology for the characterization of strategies of social action, where the potential arbitrariness of interpretation is avoided *as a matter of the technique itself*. Our view is that this is faithful to our BACHELARDian inspiration. The methodological technology through which this might be achieved is then our central issue.¹ [6]

In this article we suggest that the necessary disruption of proper forms of thought highlighted by BACHELARD can be achieved with a specific technological intervention: the principled generation and deployment of what we will refer to as *relational spaces*. Here we draw upon and develop the work of DOWLING—especially his "Sociology as Method" (2009), see also DOWLING (2013). The *negation* a relational space achieves is to counter static and classificatory forms of thinking; those that tend to essentialize the substance of the other as a matter of being. The *positivity* it achieves is to exhaust the possibilities of action in their local setting in a systematically relational way without any appeal to a generative exteriority from which such action is thought to be emergent. As explained below, the ordering of the phenomena of the surface of action is taken to be the all there is. What then matters is the reality of the ordering (as an artifact of social research) as a principled recontextualization of social action. [7]

In what follows, this argument is illustrated by taking a concrete example from the field of deviance studies. Through reference to interview data relating to the study of illegal file-sharing, we consider the methodological implications of moving from a diagrammatic technology that only weakly ruptures established categories (BECKER's [1963] use of classificatory spaces when describing marijuana use) to an original relational space whose artifice is of a higher power. [8]

BECKER's work provides a very interesting illustration of the methodological issue, one that demonstrates the stark difficulty of evading essentialist terms in social research. He is motivated by an attempt to rupture (in his case the category of deviance) and, in his methodological writing (1998, 2014), repeatedly turns to consider the productivity of the orthogonal juxtaposition of binaries in the use of diagrams. We share these interests. Yet in BECKER, the use of the resulting 2 x 2 table in his analysis of types of deviant behavior ends up itself undermining his otherwise pragmatic efforts at rupture: this is because his application of the technology marks a relapse to a classificatory logic to which his writing is normally opposed. As we will discuss, this tension has been examined by other scholars, and indeed by BECKER himself (if less so in his later methodological writing). In considering this case, our specific aim is to show that diagrams *can* offer the chance to contract the social into researchable form in a

1 There is a second, more profound divergence from realist interpretations of BACHELARD in our argument. We take it to be an ontological reality of social research that the categories of analysis are themselves emergent on the autopoietic social action of the researcher. In our view, no claim to exterior warrant (appeals to the intransitive or to the epistemic) can escape such action. The repeated ironies in both FOUCAULT and BOURDIEU to the fictional nature of their endeavors should, we believe, be taken as intrinsic to their work. It is then the regulation of the social research context (its institutionalization) that determines the sense both of truth and reality in the outputs of research rather than an elsewhere.

way that avoids the reproduction of value-saturated terms: the key is their relational design. [9]

In what follows we contrast the BACHELARDian insistence on the need for ongoing rupture with the more established notion of epistemological break. The productivity, but also challenge, of achieving a relational ethics of rupture is then considered. This is illustrated through a discussion of BOURDIEU's appropriation of BACHELARD's thinking in his writing on the methodology of social research. We then turn to our empirical exemplar of the difficulty of achieving artifice in research: the study of deviance. BECKER's use of a cross-product in "Outsiders" (1963)—and the limits of this for rupturing with substantive thought—is examined. The value of moving from the classification of types to the mapping of emergent strategic modes is then demonstrated via reference to WHITEMAN's study of the ethics of filesharing. The principles that underpin the technique of relational spaces are summarized in the conclusion. [10]

2. BACHELARD and the Process of Rupture

Writing at a time of scientific upheaval when the achievements of science seemed to be accelerating (LECOURT, 1975, pp.32-33), BACHELARD (1968 [1940], 2002 [1938]) presents a vision of scientific thought that challenges traditional notions of scientific progress as one of continuity and step-by-step development. In its place he emphasizes discontinuities, presenting rupture as artificially coaxed events—the rather monolithic phrase epistemological break, although now well established in the literature, was one that BACHELARD did not use himself (BALIBAR, 1978, p.208). What emerges is a processual image of scientific innovation as involving a series of counterintuitive and locally-correcting ruptures with previously taken-for-granted ways of thinking (RHEINBERGER, 2010a). [11]

To achieve this, researchers must overcome what have become known as "epistemological obstacles": "the problem of scientific knowledge must be posed in terms of obstacles" (BACHELARD, 2002 [1938], p.24). As demonstrated vividly in "The Formation of the Scientific Mind" (2002 [1938]), these may take many different forms, including what is taken to be unmediated primary observation, accepted facts, the misleading power of "explanatory words" (p.31), the way that certain scientific ideas take on values and become weighed down "by too much psychological concreteness" (p.26), and affectually satisfying but scientifically disastrous substantialism. Such obstacles are psychologically seductive and apply as much to practicing scientists in their inherited position in the history of thought as to laypeople. BACHELARD describes the lure of primary experience, for instance, as "bring[ing] with it a profusion of images: it is vivid, concrete, natural, and easy. You need only to describe it and marvel. And then you think you understand it" (p.29). Yet such obstacles threaten to "close the rupture between ordinary knowledge and scientific knowledge and re-establish[...] the continuity threatened by scientific knowledge" (LECOURT, 1975, p.135). Failure to confront them by engaging in "anxious thought"—scientific endeavor that seeks to "break with its own frames" (BACHELARD, cited in WEBER, 2001, p.xiii)

—leads to thinking that is "encrusted" (BACHELARD, 2002 [1938], p.25). This risks a closed refuge in fixed conceptions of knowledge and conservatism rather than novelty in thought. [12]

BACHELARD has often been recruited as offering the means to break at an epistemic level. This has, for example, perhaps been the central attraction of his thought to one reading of ALTHUSSERian scientific MARXism—see, for instance, LECOURT (1975). Yet, as HELSLOOT and HAK have suggested, the move to scientificity in ALTHUSSER involves a "continuous breaking away from 'error'" (HELSLOOT & HAK, 2007, §7) after it has been established. This idea of continuing rather than epistemic rupture has been a major theme of recent readings of BACHELARD's work in non-ALTHUSSERian frameworks (KOTOWICZ, 2016; WACQUANT, 2018). These have moved beyond (indeed, broken with) an understanding of epistemological break as characterizing unpredictable discontinuities in the epistemic order of things, for example those suggested by FOUCAULT (1970 [1966]). [13]

There are two elementary reasons why a break at an over-arching epistemic level is not possible. First, even if the idea is accepted, most social research relies considerably (as in this paper) on ordinary language for its articulation. As such it is likely to inherit an unexamined core of metaphors—and these may be non-consciously selected in the protection of interests generating certainties of justification. Very often the adoption of a theoretical category is no defense against this: all that is possible is to provide moments of estrangement and confrontation (DERRIDA, 1978 [1967]). Second, the idea of monolithic structures of cognitive principle—those that suggest the existence of knowledge-as-such from which an epistemic break could be wrought—does not withstand scrutiny of the bricolaging-mess or "motley" of specialized human practices (TURNBULL, 2000, p.4). Nor does it recognize the genealogical sensitivity that bodies of essentialist thought perpetually appear in new garb; not least in the "mirages of the new" declared under the banner of epistemological break itself (DERRIDA, 1982 [1972], p.140). [14]

In place of large scale epistemic-breaks, a more pragmatic picture is possible of ongoing rupture even at a very local level of description (KOTOWICZ, 2016). This is a situation parallel to the move from the sense of "paradigm" as over-arching principles of cognition in KUHN (1962) to his later emphasis on analogical reasoning as case recontextualizes case (KUHN, 1970; see also FORRESTER, 2017). What matters in the analysis of data, we argue, is that the recognition that one empirical circumstance of social action is like another should take relational form. To explain this further we briefly discuss BOURDIEU's work as an exemplar of relational social research that, for us, embodies an ethics of rupture. [15]

3. BOURDIEU's Appropriation of BACHELARD in Social Research

In "The Practice of Reflexive Sociology," sociological methods are presented by BOURDIEU as "[...] a *modus operandi*, a mode of scientific production which presupposes a definite mode of perception, a set of principles of vision and division" (1992, p.222). This is underpinned by the BACHELARDian insight of the need to exert a break with preconstructed ideas: the given notions and presuppositions that constitute reassuring "shared representations" (p.235) of the social world as a known/knowable entity. At issue is how naturalized ideas, metaphors and perceived facts shape and are reproduced in social research in a way that often goes unnoticed and unchecked. [16]

The challenge that BOURDIEU presents to researchers is to engage in "radical doubt": to deliberately "construct an alternative perspective on 'common-sense' knowledge or 'everyday' events" (ROBBINS, 1998, p.46) by questioning the way that research objects and the interpretative schemes deployed in analysis are formulated. Achieving this is intensely difficult—"[...] more often proclaimed than performed" (BOURDIEU et al., 1991 [1968], p.13)—not least because we cannot escape the grip of language, itself "an immense repository of naturalized preconstructions" (BOURDIEU, 1992, p.241). [17]

BOURDIEU points to the need for a double break with obstacle-like preconceptions that may take both common-sense and scholarly forms (BOURDIEU et al., 1991 [1968], p.13). The trouble is that research must take as its starting point for scholarly endeavor "blinding self-evidences which all too easily provide the illusion of immediate knowledge and its insuperable wealth" (ibid.). The researcher must first break with the ruling metaphors of the quotidian taken-for-granted: such as when categories such as the social and the individual are taken as explanatory objects for their rationalistically privileged subjects. Yet the researcher may also be blinded by the self-evidences of the academy, for example through armchair or *a priori* theorization. [18]

BOURDIEU's response, strongly influenced by CASSIRER (1953 [1910])—see particularly VANDENBERGHE (1999, 2001)—was to develop an apparatus that is relationally conceived: field as the orthogonal juxtaposition of different ratios of capital, habitus posited beyond subject-object dichotomies. The content of this apparatus is nominalized to a conception of strategy which opposes the idea of strategy as involving individual choice (or holistically conceived societal intent). This allows a description of the play of contingent trajectories of social positioning through which identities are both emergent and valorized as a matter of the antagonistic interests staked through them. It is worth recalling that BOURDIEU's confrontation of substantialist valorizations of social position through the artifice of a relational apparatus is directly inspired by BACHELARD. The resulting processual orientation—one that puts key emphasis on the symbolic transmutation of the various capitals into sociodicy—is exemplary in demonstrating a method of analysis that ruptures methodologically individualistic frames of thought. [19]

There are, however, two central pitfalls when attempting to apply BOURDIEU's thought. The first is the reliance on terms that are too easily appropriated in non-relational ways: for example, "capital"—varieties of which tend to proliferate uncontrollably in the social research literature (DUDLEY-SMITH & WHITEMAN, in press; WHITE, 2017). The second is the empirical overhead of describing "field." This cost is so considerable that many overtly BOURDIEUian researchers simply describe habitus and forms of capital, detaching them from the relations of field that, for BOURDIEU, achieve the break from essentialism. Given that notions such as capital, with its associations with orthodox economic theory, then become something people do or do not have, these researchers are thus at risk of falling back into a methodologically individualistic and substantialist framework (FINE, 2001) that BOURDIEU himself would reject. [20]

4. Artifice in Method: Two Key Moves

Our argument is that other technologies are available to make such a (double) rupture in a way that provides a local grip on the empirical. Rather than the totalizing ambition of field/habitus in the description of relational entities as extensive as "the field of cultural production" (BOURDIEU, 1983, p.315), our interest is in a much more pragmatic and local form: the principled production of *relational spaces*, whose properties will be introduced below. Our claim is that these provide an overlooked methodological resource for contracting the contingencies of local empirical practice into strategic form. [21]

Such spaces first became clear we believe in the development of social activity method (DOWLING, 1998, 2009, 2013). This work involves a sustained attempt to produce relational consistency in social description *without any assumption of a totalizing structure*. Before introducing our exemplar, two aspects of this methodology (DOWLING's preferred term is "method") need emphasis. [22]

The first is the need to maintain a separation between the principles of description and the described. Following DOWLING (2009), we will call this the principle of recontextualization. Artifice engineers a separation from the taken-to-be real in social action. In accordance with this, social activity method stands self-referentially on its own terms. Attention is placed on the relational and emergent shaping of modes of action, and efforts are directed towards the generation of an orderly and explicit language for describing these (2009, p.41). As such, the method's justification is that it shows itself able to productively re-describe the social in ways that make strange the quotidian basis of action. [23]

The second is to follow BOURDIEU (in his recontextualization of semiotics) and conceive of the social as a play of strategic action. Yet, rather than requiring the panoply of "field" to produce this (with its relations of different proportions of capital defining the space of strategic play), social alliance can be seen to be emergent on local orderings of action which may (or may not) repeat in future action. How such orderings may be conceived is the matter of the following sections. [24]

5. The Study of Deviance

As AEBI and LINDE (2015) have described, if confronting epistemological obstacles "is a difficult task in the natural sciences, it is even more so in the domain of the social sciences. Here, the margin of interpretation is wider and it is sometimes filled—voluntarily or involuntarily—with ideology" (p.318). It is perhaps worth adding that without the discipline of a method that explicitly articulates systematic principles of description such filling becomes highly likely. This phenomenon is visible in the historical study of deviance, where scholars have resisted but also inadvertently reinforced essentialized notions of what is and is not acceptable at different points in time. If the crucial concern of relational analysis is how to move beyond the classificatory oppositions deployed by practitioners in the social, this field of scholarship demonstrates the difficulty of resisting categories deployed as a matter of self-evidence. A good way to see this is to consider BECKER's use of the technique of cross-products in his study of deviance. [25]

5.1 Interrogating previous research—BECKER

In his study of deviant behavior, "Outsiders" (1963; see also BECKER, 1998, 2014), BECKER challenges lay perspectives that accept "the common-sense premise that there is something inherently deviant (and therefore qualitatively distinct) about acts that break (or seem to break) social rules" (1963, p.3). The homology with BACHELARDian thought—and its close correspondence with key themes of pragmatism—is clear in the rejection of moralizing investments in social scientific objects through the recruitment of supposedly knowable notions of what was deviant and perverse at the time. [26]

BECKER's analysis then combines two dimensions orthogonally: whether acts are regarded as deviant by others or not, and whether an act "conforms to a particular rule" (1963, p.19). This marks out four "theoretical types of deviance" (p.21). These are presented by BECKER in the following table:

	Obedient behavior	Rule-breaking behavior
Perceived as deviant	Falsely accused	Pure deviant
Not perceived as deviant	Conforming	Secret deviant

Table 1: Types of deviant behavior (adapted from BECKER, 1998, p.174) [27]

In "Outsiders," BECKER carefully establishes what this "set of categories for the discrimination of different kinds of deviance" (1963, p.19) does and does not relate to. The space organizes a gaze of classification that comes from the point-of-view of rules of behavior and focuses on actions (and responses to actions) rather than people or personalities (p.20). He also suggests the value of the schema for rupture in the way that "cross-classifying kinds of behavior and the

responses they evoke distinguish between phenomena that differ in important respects but are ordinarily considered to be similar" (p.21). [28]

BECKER's space is generalizable to other empirical settings. For example, it would be possible to frame illegal file-sharing in these terms. For those seeking to impose the hegemonic gaze of copyright possession, the purchasing of content would be an example of conforming behavior; the visible hosting activity of a peer-to-peer file-sharing site a case of the pure deviant. A mistaken accusation of downloading (arising from an accidental click, for instance) would exemplify the "bum rap" (p.20) of the falsely accused, while the secret deviant's rule-breaking act escapes notice—the successful hack. By drawing out such categories, BECKER's cross-product undermines binary conceptualizations of deviancy, provoking a consideration of the ways different actions might be constituted as deviant/not deviant. It also has the important property of opening the realization that tacitly accepted acts of secret deviance may suddenly be reclassified as pure deviancy when articulated in a moral panic or during governmental or media drives against certain forms of deviance. [29]

Two features of this schema—the focus on actions over persons and way that cross-dimensioning enables a "discrimination" of phenomena—are productively relational. However, as has often been remarked, BECKER deploys a typologizing grammar that generates a focus on objects to be classified (ABBOTT, 2001, p.74; SPECTOR & KITSUSE, 1987, p.62) rather than modes of action. The use of labels such as "falsely accused" and "secret deviance" seems to presume that deviance can be identified independently of the labelling process (HAMMERSLEY, 2001, p.94). A symptom of this is that the oppositions taken to organize action are very close to those deployed by practitioners. It is little surprise that there are already quotidian descriptors available for some types: "falsely accused" / "the bum rap." For these reasons the abstraction in BECKER's space can be regarded as a *classificatory* rather than relational. In the end it does not escape categorizing people as such: this is principally because the individual is taken to be the unit of analysis. [30]

BECKER's response to this criticism configures himself as being much more relaxed about such things than his critics (see, e.g., BECKER, 2009²). Yet it is notable that in his writing on method BECKER (1998, 2014) pays explicit attention to the formal workings of such tables and to the disciplined analytical power of the relationality at play within them, returning to consider these issues multiple times. This includes a focus on the orthogonality of LAZARSFELD's property spaces (see BECKER, 1998, 2014) and a transformation of his 2 x 2 diagram into the form of a logic table in "Tricks of the Trade" (BECKER, 1998).³ The relational completeness of these tables (the idea that, given the combination of the oppositions on each axis, no other possibilities are possible) is a particular point of methodological emphasis in this work. The valuing of methodological rigor in his discussion of the use of such diagrams as logical technologies, can thus be

2 Our thanks to one of our anonymous referees for directing us to this.

3 Whilst the latter removes the problematically loaded signifiers from Table 1 (replacing them with + and -), yet again the substance of the labels creeps back in—here within the writing.

seen to rub up somewhat uncomfortably against his expressions of more playful indiscipline in defending his own table's limits. Our argument is that relational rather than classificatory spaces help to provide such discipline, without closing-down engagement with the empirical, and in doing so lend support to pragmatic social research. [31]

5.2 Copy-fighting: Essentialist positions on illegal file-sharing

The contemporary "copyright" relating to the illegal sharing and streaming of copyrighted media content is a significant example of where notions of deviance play out (CLULEY, 2013; DAVID, 2010; LINDGREN, 2013; YAR, 2006). In recent years intellectual property rights have been a highly contested political terrain, inhabited by normalized taken-for-granted facts that are shaped by the interventions of industry, regulators, educators, and government. Studies of the attitudes and perspectives of those engaged in these practices (ANDERSSON, 2012a, 2012b; ANDERSSON SCHWARZ & LARSSON, 2013; LEWIS, 2015; STEINMETZ & TUNNELL, 2013; YU, 2012) have provided an important challenge to sedimented normative assertions as to which contemporary audience actions are good or bad, rejecting "[...] a priori justifications for or against intellectual property protections" (LEWIS, 2015, p.46). [32]

Yet, from the perspective of the methodological issues introduced above, this work also demonstrates the difficulties of escaping the double-bind that researchers face. The influence of preconstructed artefacts in the methodology of this literature is evident in the deployment of concepts and ideas that can be seen to be borrowed from the social world (BOURDIEU & WAQUANT, 1992, p.236). When the terminology deployed by scholars remains within the register of ordinary language, it achieves immediate accessibility. Examples include categories of "attitudes for support [for copyright protection]" such as "sweat of the brow," "theft," "artist rights" and "protection" (LEWIS, 2015, p.51), references to the "tropes" of "mass influence, civil rights and shared community" (ANDERSSON SCHWARZ & LARSON, 2013, p.234), to the "mirroring" between awareness of individual gratification and the slogan "caring is sharing" (ANDERSSON, 2012a, p.597), and the use of the metaphor of "blood donation" for understanding file-sharing activity (p.585). This proliferation of value-laden terms demands intensive scrutiny (BOURDIEU et al., 1991 [1968], p.23). Without this, the danger is of relying on common expressions that too easily supply "the appearance of explanation" (p.22). Such individualistically moralizing terms are likely to do little more than reflect-back to practitioners the already-known (BOURDIEU, 2019). [33]

The imposition of more scholarly theoretical frames runs the opposite risk of closing-down the empirical. BOLTANSKI and THÉVENOT's (2006 [1991]) six regimes of justification have been particularly influential in file-sharing research (ANDERSSON SCHWARZ & LARSSON, 2013; EDWARDS, KLEIN, LEE, MOSS & PHILIP, 2015). The recruitment of such frameworks sees scholars revealing the theoretical; positioning audience responses within preconceived "orders of worth." Thus: "We will see below how a similar notion of progress could be seen to

operate as a justificatory regime among our respondents" (ANDERSSON SCHWARZ & LARSSON, 2013, p.222). A similar situation has arisen in neutralization theory (MacNEIL, 2017; STEINMETZ & TUNNELL, 2013; YU, 2012). Scholars here claim to have uncovered strategies that are presented as being unavailable to, or unknowingly adopted by, file-sharers: "According to their verbal accounts, it was found that most of them employed, unknowingly, the techniques of neutralization when justifying digital piracy" (YU, 2012, p.374). The file-sharers themselves are thus effectively reduced to silence: the real truth of their practice is only discernible by the researcher. [34]

Recent research drawing on symbolic interactionist frameworks has emphasized the complexities and ambivalences within, and the play between, pro and anti-filesharing discourses. LINDGREN's (2013) comparative analysis of news and blog sites, for example, examines the disruption of hegemonic/counter-hegemonic positions relating to the filesharing issue, suggesting that "[t]he proponents and opponents of piracy can both, simultaneously, be moral entrepreneurs and folk devils" (p.1261). From our specifically methodological interest, the problem is that the categories that are relied on to dismantle this ambiguity and indeterminacy are not relational. Emphasis is placed on discursive instability and fragmentation, and the limits of established categories for thinking about this: such as the "[difficulty of] categoriz[ing] utterances using the representational modes described by Cohen (1972)" (p.1257). Yet, what is *not* confronted is how the researcher might interpret empirical material in a way that avoids essentializing. Indeed, the empirical complexity of the discursive positioning is demonstrated through a thematic analysis that makes use of vernacular labels such as "personal integrity," "democracy," and "file-sharing" (p.1256). The result of this is that—despite the very important move to unsettle essentialized and sedimented ways of thinking about filesharing—the disruption only goes so far. [35]

5.3 Countering classification with relational analysis

Our methodological rupture with Table 1 was achieved by placing our reading of BECKER's schema in dialogue both with academic and media coverage of filesharing and original interview data that WHITEMAN generated during a 2010 study of the ethics of contemporary media audiences. In WHITEMAN's project, semi-structured qualitative interviews (15 interviews with 7 women and 8 men, aged 20 to 54) were used to examine individuals' ethical maneuvering with respect to the use of new technologies to access and exchange media content. Given the focus of the interviews, which included discussion of illegal as well as illicit downloading and online sharing practices, a snowball sampling method was used to recruit participants from initial contacts. Such an approach is common in the study of sensitive topics and hard to reach populations (ELLARD-GRAY, JEFFREY, CHOUBAK & CRANN, 2015). Participants were sought who did not self-identify as filesharers given the common focus in the literature on this category (a third of the participants had never engaged in filesharing).⁴ [36]

4 The project was funded by a British Academy Small Research Grant (Grant Reference: SG 54626).

Moving between these sources provoked a reworking of BECKER's diagram into a relational space whilst maintaining an interest in judgment/legitimation. Whilst BECKER's (1963) schema orients around the pejorative expression "deviance," Table 2 below does not. Rather than types of behavior, the interest is now in the emergence of different strategies of discernment within texts—the individual is no longer the unit of analysis.

Embodied regard on action	Objectifying regard on action	
	Positive	Negative
Negative	Affirming/disaffirming	Dismissing
Positive	Lauding	Disaffirming/affirming

Table 2: Strategies of discernment [37]

The vertical dimension asks whether the reported embodied response to an action (either of self or other) is positive or negative. This might be best considered as the regard from personal affective norm (an intuitive or habitual sense of right or wrong, the moral law in one's heart). From the perspective of social theory, this is a matter of purity/impurity: the often tacit modes of classification at work in the social. The horizontal dimension, in contrast, considers reference to any objectifying regard (the adoption of a rationalizing point of view, the indexing of any formally or informally expressed rule, or law). Four modes are produced by this juxtaposition. These include two where embodied and objectified regards assemble in harmony to reinforce the assessment of an action as being either positive (pure) or negative (impure): what we have termed lauding and dismissing. [38]

However, the space also indicates the possibility of ambiguity and tension between competing regards: disaffirming/affirming and affirming/disaffirming; the order of these labels indexed by the arbitrary order of the space (horizontal, objectifying; vertical, embodied). When coordinated in this way, these dimensions introduce the possibility that a gaze might attribute positive value to an act that is regarded as illicit from an objectified (perhaps official) regard, or vice-versa. Rationalized deviance can be admired, even though this possibility has not always been acknowledged in deviancy studies (HECKERT & HECKERT, 2002). Yet in BECKER's schema, the only positive hope for an illicit act would be that it would go unnoticed. This is a disaffirming/affirming mode. Equally, it is of course possible to find oneself feeling bad about something that is positively objectified: affirming/disaffirming. [39]

A further advantage of this methodological approach is that the frame of reference can shift according to context. This feature is significant because different socio-cultural positions may obviously regard similar actions in different ways. The moralizing rejection of the legitimacy of objectively legal forms of online sharing in industry-funded anti-piracy educational initiatives, for instance, deprives legal filesharing of legitimacy in a mode of affirming/disaffirming.

References by VALENTI (2003), the ex-president of the Motion Picture Association of America to "file-stealers" "assaulting" the movie industry dismisses through both emotive language and appeal to the law. In contrast, the actions of a PirateBay co-founder in asserting that people, despite its acknowledged illegality, shouldn't "[...] feel ashamed about being file-sharers, but that it is a natural and quite common activity online" (HARTLEY, 2010, n.p.) endorses filesharing through localized expression in a disaffirming/affirming discernment mode. Finally, educational research lauds legal filesharing when it draws attention to the embodied competencies that may be acquired through participation within an activity that is acknowledged to be legal (e.g., LIVINGSTONE & BOBER, 2003). If BECKER's diagram reified a framework of types, this space allows competing relational positions to speak. [40]

Whilst the space enables the mapping of multiple regards from different sources, it can also be used to trace emergent tensions between conflicting regards within specific accounts given by a single individual. This can be illustrated by reference to an interview from WHITEMAN's study—part of the empirical data that originally inspired our reworking of BECKER's space. When a participant who did not engage in filesharing activity was asked whether she felt the same way about the illegal downloading of films, television and music, she responded:

"The film industry I think is a little bit, it's hard for people to get funding for films, to get distribution for films and film to make money and I like cinemas and I like films and maybe it's because I see those ads at the cinema saying 'don't download' and 'don't illegally watch this' and I wouldn't want to feel like I'm doing something wrong there but at the same time if there's a film I want to see and I can't get access to it legally and I can watch it, my motivation to watch the film would, I believe, in fact I'm pretty, I'm certain, would overcome any ethical qualms." [41]

Initially the reference to the industry warning against participation in illegal activity aligns with the emotive "wouldn't want to feel like I'm doing something wrong"—illegal filesharing is configured as wrong in both objectified and affective terms: a dismissing strategy. Almost immediately, however, comes a shift of mode: the text acknowledges that filesharing is unacceptable from an objectified regard (the rationalization of producers' rights and the presence of the law); but attributes positive value to the action in the way that it might satisfy personal feelings of desire for content. Such switches in strategy demonstrate the way that an emergent order may destabilize within discourse—even within one sentence. [42]

6. Alterity Effectiveness

The rupturing move from an individualized reproduction of existing classificatory types to a relational concept of strategic mode enables a sharp methodological critique of the filesharing literature. From LEWIS's (2015) classification of attitudes of "support," "resistance," "economic resistance" and "technological resistance" towards copyright and file-sharing, to empirically-derived typologies such as NUTALL et al.'s (2011) six "tribes" of consumers, lists of key categories and themes are ubiquitous in the literature. Indeed, as with our reference to *capital* above, their indeterminacy can be seen in the way that they tend to multiply as they are refined. Once different kinds of things start to be articulated there is little to constrain their enumeration. [43]

Relational spaces are more modest than such lists. They offer up what is going on with respect to an empirically observed but theoretically defined juxtaposition of oppositions and nothing else. The rationale for modesty is important. The resulting diagrams do not constitute a storage system of boxes in which to throw data: the challenge is to find levels of analysis at which multiple strategies within a given text might be organized. Rather than reduce informants to types, analysis becomes scalable from short phrases upwards. Any individual may respond in multiple modes. In addition, because the dimensions of analysis are founded on polar opposites, they produce logical closure—as BECKER himself described in his writing on method, given the particular combination of binaries, there are no other possible outcomes when dimensions are set together in this way. Thus, relational spaces also draw attention to the possibility of unexpected strategies that might not have been empirically observed or predicted from a common-sense or scholarly perspective. This also sheds light on BOURDIEU et al.'s (1991 [1968], p.100) emphasis on the potential productivity of relationality in revealing the unnoticed and/or unacknowledged ambiguities of scholarly presuppositions. [44]

The focus on strategic action moves away from the security of the everyday entities referenced in the filesharing scholarship when the empirical is approached thematically—through concepts such as "motivations, ideologies and attitudes toward intellectual property" (LEWIS, 2015, p.46) and "pro-download" and "anti-download" categories' (STEVENS & BELL, 2012, p.756)—towards a focus on the emergent strategies by which ethical stances are constituted. This provides a way to disrupt essentialized notions that many of those working in this field appear to promote. It was certainly productive that BECKER was fundamentally concerned with the process of action. Indeed, one merit of BECKER's schema is that it maps out possible trajectories—moving from one type of deviancy to another. However, as we have indicated, it isolates three nouns; there is only one gerund, and that is of a stable-state ("conforming"). Classificatory spaces—although commonplace in social research—seem often held together by such insinuations of substance. Relational spaces, in contrast, bring to fruition BECKER's insight of the value of orthogonality in relational thinking by eliminating substance altogether. [45]

The methodological achievement of distance of this kind has the benefit of enabling analytical frameworks to achieve a wider applicability than those tied closely to specific phenomena. The collapse of putatively theoretical codes into their local empirical referents in the fleshing literature described earlier limits the applicability of this work to the specificities of one empirical context or activity. Thus, as LEWIS (2015) acknowledges, the transferability of his coding frame may be restricted "to other research sites that share particular contextual factors" (p.48). The fact that empirical phenomena are moving targets (particularly those relating to technological developments) provides another pragmatic reason for seeking such distance. [46]

There are certainly challenges to generating relational spaces. One of these is the difficulty of selecting terms. In developing Table 2, for instance, we found ourselves tempted to turn to words that bear the seductive essentialism that we have warned against in this article. Without a highly formal language one cannot entirely escape such preconceptions. We found that keeping the somewhat unwieldy dyads affirming/disaffirming and disaffirming/affirming maintained a focus on the ambiguity in the data and prevented us from imposing ready-made ideas. The terms we have used may not be immediately accessible or appealing; but they index the complexity of strategic moves that become discernible through this method. The modesty we have indexed above can also be seen as a limitation: the space we have introduced is unable to map text that shows indecision or indifference, for instance. To capture this, further diagrams would be required. The completeness that relational spaces offer is thus narrowly defined; on the other hand, this gives them considerable analytical grip. [47]

7. Conclusion

"The sociologist's struggle with spontaneous sociology is never finally won, and he [sic] must conduct unending polemics against the blinding self-evidences which all too easily provide the illusion of immediate knowledge and its insuperable wealth" (BOURDIEU et al., 1991 [1968], p.13).

In this article we have argued for the value of technique in achieving artifice in method. More specifically, we have suggested the use of a robust diagrammatic relational approach in seeking to obtain a rupturing otherness in the analysis of data. The pursuit of such otherness is, we believe, vital if research is to avoid the specter of the preconstructed. [48]

The exploration of artifice in method could, of course, be extended beyond the parameters of the theoretical and methodological ground that we have covered. As has been suggested more generally by ALBERT et al. (2018), BACHELARDian considerations, despite their significant influence to date, still have the potential to develop a rich line of methodological inquiry. There is an urgency in the need to reignite these ideas, not just because their implications for social research are profound, but also because they challenge much of what is currently produced within the academy. [49]

We have argued that the development of relational spaces in social activity method provides one way of achieving necessary otherness in social research. If one so wishes, such spaces can be thought of as real entities. Yet we struggle to see what such a categorization would achieve. What is of critical significance is the productivity of these spaces when describing the social. They are themselves part of a social activity (the methodology of social activity method). As such they are regulated by explicit principles. First, allow only continuity/discontinuity as the foundation of principled description (the semiotic inheritance). Second, specialize recognition of these differences according to a sense of emergent and processual social action: see that action as strategic, as intending the formation of alliance/opposition. Third, juxtapose (as a principle of methodology) oppositions as they play against each other. [50]

In our analysis of interview data, we sought to demonstrate these principles in an applied way. Our analysis configured the establishing of positions in relation to notions of deviance as an intensely social activity involving the dynamic formation of sometimes conflicting alliances/oppositions. The strategies of discernment diagram articulates a relational view of this, and in doing so challenges the attribution of solidity and security to conceptualizations of perspectives on an activity like filesharing that are taken as self-evident in some academic literature. The method presented opens up what might elsewhere be configured as substantive attitudes or opinions grounded in the everyday. It also rejects the formulation of over-arching formalist structure to present a more relational account of the ethics of media audiences. [51]

At the same time, Table 2 does not only have use value for scholars interested in filesharing activity. As we have discussed, because—like other relational spaces—it is not tied to the empirical specificity of one context, it has the potential to move: in this case from the field of criminology or audience research to other areas of academic interest. Indeed, it may prove of use to map any area in which issues of value or legitimacy are the focus of research. [52]

The juxtaposition at work in spaces such as Table 2 ensures that no binary can accrue inadvertent essentialized investments—there are always four, not two modes in each space (or to the power of two if further dimensions are added). There is then explicit and principled regulation of description that ruptures the phenomenological self-evidence of the categories of quotidian social description. There is no supplementary appeal to depth, which would ultimately involve the idea that the researcher could somehow know the conditions of their own critique. The status of relational spaces is resolutely analogical, not totalizing. What results is a diagrammatic ordering of modes of action that is relationally conceived rather than relations between people—a matter of technique, not networking. Thinking of relationality in this way enables a fine-grained "constructive description" (DOWLING, 2009, p.48) of social process that is separate from the action it regards. [53]

This article used BECKER's typology of deviance as a way of demonstrating the move from classificatory to relational spaces. As we have discussed, it is of great

interest to us that in his methodological writings, BECKER places considerable emphasis on the potential technological productivity of cross-tabulation: sensing perhaps that this is a way of undoing the ontological gravity of dualisms, but also providing an explicit framework through which the principles of description can be made visible to the reader of social research. In closing, it is worth noting that BECKER's work is an example of where the methodological problem at hand—the difficulty of rupturing with preconstructions—was confronted. BECKER was aware (or made aware) of it and has discussed it directly (if not completely resolving the tensions evident in his work). Yet too often, this insidious problem is *not* confronted, *not* acknowledged in research writing. This is despite the attention that has been given to BACHELARD's writing elsewhere. Our suggestion is that greater attention still needs to be placed on the practical implications of this issue. Going further, we would suggest that whilst the technology presented here bears a family resemblance to other familiar analytical devices, the potential of this specific form of relationality is considerable for those actively seeking methodological rupture. [54]

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